



February 2007

UFF MEMBERSHIP MEETING

All UFF members are invited to attend the UFF/FAU Spring Membership Meeting and Luncheon on Friday, March 16, from 11:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. in the Board of Trustees Room, 3rd floor, Administration Building, Boca campus. Chapter president Lydia Smiley will deliver a State of the Faculty Union report at that time. We will be holding elections for next year's chapter officers on that occasion as well. The positions to be filled are: chapter president, first vice president, second vice president, secretary, treasurer, and state senators. If you have any interest in serving as a chapter officer or wish to nominate someone who you think would be suitable, please contact Lydia (7-3287, smiley@fau.edu). Ballots will be available at the meeting for the election to proceed.

CONTRACT RATIFICATION

Collective bargaining has been completed for our new three-year Contract (the BOT/UFF Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2006-2009). You will shortly receive a ratification ballot along with a Contract summary in campus mail. If you don't, contact Lydia Smiley (7-3287, smiley@fau.edu). Be sure to vote and return your ballot. Full text of the new Contract is available on line at www.fau.edu/provost/files/CBA2006-2009.pdf.

REFLECTIONS

IS COLLEGE A COMMODITY?

The U.S. Department of Education, the Florida Board of Governors, and the FAU Board of Trustees increasingly describe higher education as a commodity. Their words are having an impact on students, parents, and the general public, who see themselves as consumers, and on administrators who see themselves as providers, of the commodity *education*. In response to state calls for more bachelor's degrees in areas of critical job shortages, Indian River Community College is asking the state Board of Education for approval to offer bachelor's degrees in education, nursing, and organizational management. IRCC President Ed Massey believes IRCC is ready to help meet the statewide shortage in these areas. Rebekah Thompson, president of IRCC student government, says "We're really excited.... It doesn't matter if you go to Harvard or IRCC, as long as you have a degree." ("Community College Seeks 4-year Status: Indian River asks state for OK" Sun-Sentinel December 26, 2006, p. 4B)

The assertion that *a degree is a degree is a degree* assumes that college is a commodity. Wikipedia defines a commodity as an undifferentiated product, a good or service that is bought and sold in the marketplace solely on the basis of price, rather than quality or some other features, because it is of uniform quality. The *maker* or *provider* of a commodity is not important. If college is a commodity, then degrees can be substituted like wheat or pork futures.

Florida policy makers are encouraging the commodification of college by emphasizing standardization and data such as the percentage of adults in Florida with bachelor's degrees. The FAU administration also seems enamored of education as a commodity. The almost continual pressure to increase class sizes, and the sudden allocation of a significant amount of money this past fall to equip classrooms for distance learning, reflect this perspective. But it is probably not a good strategic plan for FAU to try to compete in the higher education marketplace by these means, which are widely available in the state and, for that matter, throughout the nation. Despite any belief that Harvard and IRCC and FAU provide equivalent degrees/commodities, FAU's development as a higher education institution will likely depend on developing a distinctive character and providing distinctive programs. Ideally, they should be distinguished as well as distinctive.

ADMINISTRATION (ON THE) OFFENSIVE

On January 24, Michael Mattimore, of the law firm of Allen, Norton & Blue, and chief collective bargaining negotiator for our employers (the Administration and the Board of Trustees), dispatched a letter addressed to Dr. Lydia R. Smiley, President, FAU Chapter of the United Faculty of Florida. The letter provides notice that our employers (see above) wish to remove certain categories of faculty from the faculty bargaining unit and from the protections of the BOT/UFF Collective Bargaining Agreement. These categories of faculty are:

1. All faculty in the Charles E. Schmidt College of Biomedical Science.
2. All faculty in the Florida Atlantic University Schools.
3. Members of our bargaining unit in Computer Research, the Student Counseling Center, and Student Health Services.
4. The faculty member elected as president of the University Faculty Senate, who while in that capacity serves as a member of the Board of Trustees.

The letter continues with the statement that "the University" is prepared to meet for discussion on this issue, warning that, if UFF does not reply within ten days, there will be the assumption of consent.

We have replied, indicating our interest in meeting, and requesting the names of faculty and job descriptions as well as an explanation of changes in duties and responsibilities warranting exclusion from the bargaining unit. If the UFF disagrees with our employers' proposal, the dispute will go to the Florida Public Employees Relations Commission for resolution, in accordance with Article 28.6 of the BOT/UFF Collective Bargaining Agreement, which is binding on both parties. We'll keep you posted.

MEMBERSHIP OFFER EXTENDED

The positive response to our fall membership offer encourages us to continue the offer through the rest of the academic year. All faculty joining UFF for the first time will have membership dues set at half-off for the first year of membership. Find the half-off membership form at www.fau.edu/org/uff/halfpriceform.rtf. Print, fill out, and mail to Anita Pritchard, Department of Political Science. For more information, contact Anita (7-3089, pritchar@fau.edu) or Lydia (7-3287, smiley@fau.edu).

STUDENT RESEARCH STIPENDS

Our UFF/FAU Chapter is offering student research stipends to support honors thesis, masters thesis, or doctoral dissertation work. The amount of the award is \$550, and two awards of this amount are available. To qualify for this award, research must be on a topic related to labor relations or workplace issues. Send nominations to Bill O'Brien at wobrien@fau.edu, including the student's name and major, and a brief explanation of the student's research project. Deadline: March 1. Each nominee will be contacted and asked to provide additional information by April 1.